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ABSTRACT

Many of the problems the schools seem to face are problems only marginally related to the curriculum--problems of racial difficulty, problems of class-adjustment. In discussing the educational priorities of city schools, it was generally agreed among the speakers that these matters would be thought of here as subordinate. That is, they would take the rather old-fashioned view that the school is still an institution dedicated to the training of the mind and that the priorities are still educational. The first speaker, Mr. Wilson Riles, was the Director of the Office of Compensatory Education in the California State Department of Education. The second speaker, Dr. Carl J. Dolce, began as an elementary school teacher, had also taught in high school, been a junior high principal, and was on the faculty of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Since 1965, he has been Superintendent of Schools, Orleans Parish School Board, New Orleans. The third speaker was Martin Mayer. He had been research director of a study of international secondary education for the Twentieth Century Fund and for 6 years was chairman of a New York City local school board. He has written several books. Post-presentation discussion covered such topics as: evaluation, t8e role of the school in social adjustment and teaching values, the Bereiter-Engelmann approach, and others. (Author/JM)

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# *What Are the Priorities for City Schools?*

A discussion by

WILSON C. RILES
CARL J. DOYCE
MARTIN MAYER

Moderator:
CLIFTON FADIMAN

at a public meeting of the
Council for Basic Education
Washington, D. C.
October 25, 1968

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# *What Are the Priorities for City Schools?*

**Clifton Fadiman:**

Each year the Council for Basic Education has a meeting of this sort. We select one question bearing upon our educational system which we think is a burning question of the year, or at least an inflammatory one. This year we are to ask, What are the priorities for city schools? I should perhaps explain that the three gentlemen to my right and left are in a general way agreed upon one point: that the term "priorities" could have been preceded by the adjective "educational," or perhaps even "intellectual." All of us are aware that a great many demands are being made on the public school system that were not made thirty, forty and fifty years ago. Some of these demands are social, some custodial. Many of the problems the schools seem to face are problems only marginally related to the curriculum — problems of racial difficulty, problems of class-adjustment. In discussing the educational priorities of city schools it has been generally agreed among the speakers that while the matters just mentioned are of the utmost importance, they will be thought of here as subordinate. That is, we are taking the rather old-fashioned view that the school is still an institution dedicated to the training of the mind and that the priorities are still educational. That doesn't mean that the three distinguished gentlemen to my right and left are in precise agreement about these priorities, but they are agreed on the simple assumption that the priorities are educational in nature.

Our first speaker is at present the Director of the Office of Compensatory Education in the California State Department of Education. Mr. Riles holds the rank of Associate Superintendent of Public Instruction and serves as Executive Secretary of California's Advisory Compensatory Education Commission. His experience in the field of education has been rich and varied. I shall not rehearse all the honors that have come to him or all the positions he has held, but shall mention that in the course of his career he had twelve years'

experience as an elementary school teacher and administrator in the Arizona public schools before he came to California. He has written articles for several educational journals and is the author of the book *San Francisco Is*, one of a series of urban education studies.

## Wilson Riles:

American education's most challenging problem of the latter half of the 20th century is indisputably in the large cities. Achievement test scores show that children in the central cities lag consistently behind the average in educational attainment. The concern over elimination and unification of small, rural, inefficient school districts has now been overshadowed by the controversy over the organization and administration of large metropolitan schools districts such as New York, Washington, D. C., Chicago, and Los Angeles. Questions about quality of instructional programs and adequate educational expenditures are being raised as much in the cities with their large industrial tax base as in the poor communities of the South.

The so-called crisis in urban education appears to have materialized in the last few years, contemporaneously with our concern over civil rights and poverty. In effect, the crisis is in the center of our urban areas, in the ghettos populated by the poor and the minority groups. But the fact that children of minority groups and/or low-income families do not do as well in school as middle-class Caucasian children is not a new problem nor a sudden discovery.

Educators have long known that there is a strong correlation between a student's educational achievement and his socioeconomic background. Statistics in California show that the child from a disadvantaged background has traditionally achieved at the rate of .7 of a year for every year of instruction. This means that the disadvantaged child falls further and further behind at the rate of three months for every school year. Thus, at the end of the third grade, he is already a full year behind the middle-class student, and when he enters his teenage years, he is two years behind and about to become a statistic—a dropout.

We have traditionally thought of a dropout in terms of the child's failure to succeed in school. But a more realistic appraisal is that dropouts reflect the school's failure to succeed with the child. In effect, the child has not dropped out; he has been pushed out by a

school that has ignored his educational needs and by a school program that has had no relevance to his aspirations or learning problems.

Although most of our children come from lower-class families, our schools have been geared to the middle-class child. Our teachers come from middle-class backgrounds and naturally are better able to understand and communicate with the middle-class child. Our curriculum, textbooks and recognized teaching methods are all aimed at the experiences and values of the middle-class child.

But the instructional program that is good for the middle-class child is not necessarily good for the child whose background is one of poverty. The child of poverty has not had many of the simple experiences which we assume are common with all youngsters. He has not been taught at home to place a high value on education, to think of education as the key to success. Instead of being prepared for school with a home full of books, magazines, and newspapers, his childhood is one of illness, hunger and threat of eviction. Because of the low status that society has accorded him and his family, he is likely to have a low image of himself and a lack of motivation to succeed, at least to attain what is considered success in middle-class terms. The most severe handicap is his lack of verbal communication skills that are foundations of reading and writing. He may not speak English at all or, if he does, it comes out in monosyllables and incomplete sentences. This child is behind from the day he enters school. Failures pile upon failures until the child simply gives up.

The problem is not new. What is new is the attention that is finally being given to it. Most of the students who are dropping out today would never have attended high school at all fifty years ago. They would have quit school before reaching the secondary level and would have taken unskilled jobs which were then readily available. They would not have been considered dropouts, they would simply have joined the working class.

What is new is that unskilled jobs are diminishing because of automation and the schools have been called upon to play a major role in breaking the vicious circle of illiteracy, poverty, crime, and dependency on welfare that is taking an increasing toll in human and economic waste.

What is new is that a majority of Americans are now living in metropolitan areas, and among the "immigrants" are large proportions of persons from minority groups and low-income families. In

effect, the educational problems which have always been with us are becoming more concentrated in certain parts of our large cities and are thus becoming more visible. Recent statistics published by the Bureau of the Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that 69 percent of the Negroes and 64 percent of the whites now live in the cities or urban fringe areas. Negroes now constitute 25 percent of the residents of cities with more than one million population, and in some cities they are a majority.

And most significantly, what is new is that the poor and the alienated are no longer willing to accept the status quo. They are demanding what any middle-class parent would have demanded long ago if his child did not seem to be getting anything out of the educational system. They are demanding an accounting and a change in the system to make it more relevant to their needs.

The top priority issue facing the city schools—and in fact facing all of education—is how to improve the school achievement of the children of the poor, the disadvantaged, the groups that in the past have failed to receive the full benefits of American education. This is the goal of compensatory education.

Compensatory education is based on the premise that the disadvantaged child can succeed if he is given the assistance and the adequate educational program that will enable him to maximize his potential. It is also based on a new concept of what is meant by the phrase "equal educational opportunity."

Traditionally, educators and the public have spoken of equal educational opportunity in terms of sameness—the same textbooks, the same curriculum, the same class size, the same number of library volumes for all children. If every child received the same treatment, then every child was receiving an equal educational opportunity.

Compensatory education rejects this concept and recognizes that equal educational opportunity means an educational program geared to the needs of each individual child. This means that more money, more books, more individual attention through smaller class size, more curriculum experimentation and better teachers must be poured into the schools where economically and environmentally disadvantaged children are concentrated.

I wish to reiterate that the goal is improved *achievement.* I am happy when I hear that compensatory education has improved the

self-image or the attitudes of the children. It's nice to know that the parents feel better toward the school because of new services resulting from compensatory education. It's nice to know that the teachers' morale has gone up because of reduced class size, the help of a teacher's aide, or shiny new equipment. These are all important because they contribute to the end product. But in the end the only meaningful question is: how much has the children's achievement improved? Are they reading better? Are they spelling better? Are they computing better? Are they better prepared for a productive adulthood?

Our aim is to provide the child with the educational background and the tools to make a choice of what he wants to do with his life. Right now, the disadvantaged child has no choice. His options are limited by his lack of basic educational skills.

In line with our basic aim, compensatory education problems are centered around improvements in the instructional program. In California, for example, about 80 percent of our compensatory education projects are in instruction, mostly in the broad area of language development—reading, written and oral communication, and listening. The money is going toward employment of specialized, skilled personnel with the training and the sensitivity needed to work with disadvantaged children.

But I need to stress that there is no easy, inexpensive solution to what is a complex problem. We cannot make a significant difference in the educational attainment of the urban disadvantaged by just patching up our normal school procedures with a few remedial band-aids. Compensatory education does not consist merely of reducing class size or adding a half hour a day for reading or taking the children on a few field trips to see what they have not seen before.

Our research and evaluation have shown that the best gains in achievement have occurred where there is a comprehensive program that takes into account all of the factors that are impeding the child's learning progress. Piecemeal projects which have attempted through a single-shot activity to overcome the learning handicaps caused by poverty usually fail to result in demonstrable achievement gains.

A child who is ill and hungry cannot read. A child who has a negative feeling toward himself cannot learn because he doesn't believe in his ability to learn. A child whose experiences are limited

by the physical and psychological barriers of the ghetto must be exposed to the broader horizons beyond the walls of his immediate environment. And a child whose parents are alienated and left out of the educational process is at a distinct disadvantage when he is expected to compete with the child whose parents have, since the day he spoke his first word, prepared him for success in school. That is why counseling and guidance, parent education, cultural enrichment, health and nutritional services, tutoring and study centers, and in-service training of teachers are important supportive services in a good school program.

I emphasize that such out-of-the-classroom activities justify the resources of the schools only in relation to their contribution to the children's instructional program. Whether field trips to the local manufacturing plant are frills or good teaching tools depends on how they are used—whether they are an end in themselves or a means to the end.

The school cannot, nor should it, be expected to solve all the social, psychological, medical and employment problems of the urban ghetto. Any attempts to turn the schools' priorities away from the task of education of children must be resisted. However, at the same time, the school cannot do its job of providing the best education possible for the child of urban poverty without taking into account the factors outside the classroom which affect the child's ability to learn. Whether a particular activity should be the concern of the school must depend on the answer to the question, Is it essential to the child's learning progress?

I would like to discuss briefly another issue that plagues big city school systems—de facto segregation. The statistics are irrefutable that most children in our urban centers attend schools that are segregated, that is, where almost all of their fellow students are of the same racial or ethnic background.

In the past few years, there has been much discussion in educational circles as to the best method of improving the education of minority group students. There are some who say, "Let's forget about integration. It's too hard to accomplish. We'll pour extra resources into building 'golden ghetto schools' through compensatory education."

And there are others who say, "Let's forget about compensatory education. Just desegregate the schools and the problems of low

achievement among minority groups will vanish." This schism exists among leaders of minority groups as well as among school administrators.

I believe that the answer is not *either* compensatory education *or* integration. The two are not mutually exclusive. It is not an either/or situation, and neither can substitute for the other. Both integration and the improvement of ghetto schools are needed to reach the goal of maximizing educational opportunities for minority group youth.

A student's achievement is strongly related to the educational backgrounds and aspirations of the other students in the school. Simply put, the children learn as much from each other as they learn from the teacher. Segregation of students from the same racial and economic background works to the disadvantage of those children whose family's educational resources are meager. Such segregation deprives these children of the learning environment that is engendered by more advantaged students with their higher motivation, better verbal skills and vocabulary, and higher achievement level.

But just as compensatory education is not a substitute for integration, neither can integration be a substitute for compensatory education. Just moving the bodies around will not insure that the deprivations resulting from poverty will somehow disappear into thin air.

In California, several city school districts have developed programs that involve both compensatory education and integration for minority group students. The guidelines for federal compensatory education programs under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provide that funds may be used to plan and implement integration, with compensatory education services following the children to their new schools. In this way, the enrichment and special services that children from poverty backgrounds need will be available in the integrated schools to facilitate their learning progress.

To be realistic, it is not possible to integrate Watts of Los Angeles or the South Side of Chicago overnight or even in the near future. However, the massive size of the segregation problem should not be used as an excuse to stand still and fail to make any effort toward providing our urban students with some form of integrated educational experiences.

The last area I would like to discuss is the need for more emphasis to be placed on teacher training—both pre-service training of teacher

candidates and in-service training of practicing teachers. As more attention is placed on the problems of urban education, it becomes increasingly clear that we need more and better teachers in our poverty area schools. We are finally recognizing that teachers who work in disadvantaged schools frequently require more skills, more training, more sensitivity and more devotion. We are recognizing that it takes a special talent to bring out the often hidden potential of the disadvantaged child. We are, in effect, finally recognizing that teaching the disadvantaged is worthy of the best the profession has to offer, and not just the "leftovers" who don't have enough seniority to be promoted "up the hill."

Recruitment and training programs must be tied to the improvement of conditions in the schools. The talented and creative teachers and administrators will accept assignments in poverty neighborhoods only if working conditions are created so that the assignments offer a challenge and a possibility for success rather than predestined frustration and failure. Once a competent staff has been put together, it must be provided sufficient resources and flexibility to exert leadership and creativity. The principal and teachers must be allowed to make decisions and experiment with new ideas without going through a tortuous bureaucratic maze.

In conclusion, I would make the observation that what is at stake is the future of public education in our cities. For if the public school cannot meet the challenge placed on it by the educational needs of the poor, it will not survive. And, indeed, if the system cannot meet this, its greatest challenge, then it will not deserve to survive.

### Mr. Fadiman:

Our second speaker, Dr. Carl J. Dolce, is similarly experienced in the school system. He began as an elementary school teacher, has also taught in high school, been a junior high principal, and was on the faculty of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Since 1965 he has been Superintendent of Schools, Orleans Parish School Board, New Orleans.

### Carl J. Dolce:

Perhaps it is in reaction to my usual daily responsibilities that I have chosen an academic and what might appear to you less relevant tack in discussing the priorities for city schools. It occurs to me

that big city school systems are in a constant state of crisis, constantly moving to put out a fire here or a fire there, but seldom taking the time to think through rationally the problem of priorities and objectives.

The question which is the subject for discussion this evening is one which touches upon the basic concepts one has of the purposes of schools. The question implies at least two conditions: that all objectives cannot be attained within a particular time period, and that resources are limited and must be allocated in terms of objectives.

I would like to categorize my discussion into three parts: 1) priorities of objectives, 2) priorities of means, 3) evaluation. In this discussion, let me say that I have concern not only for the education of the child in the ghetto but for the middle-class and upper-class child. Unless the quality of education is sufficiently improved for all children, the public schools will remain, in some instances, and become, in other instances, the schools of the poor and the unwanted.

I should indicate that my remarks are confined to education as it takes place (or should take place) in schools. Most of us admit that there are innumerable objectives which our culture values. However, to admit that an objective is valued by society or by a subpart of society does not logically lead to the conclusion that such an objective should be held as primary by a particular institution. For example, it is commonly accepted that the ability of citizens to read is a basic good to which society subscribes. However, it does not follow that it is a primary function of the medical profession or of hospitals to teach clients how to read. An adequate legal defense for all accused individuals is now regarded as a basic right of citizens in the United States, but few would deem it to be the primary responsibility of the Corps of Engineers to provide legal defense services to all in need of such services.

Specialization of function appears to be an inevitable outgrowth of the increasing complexities of society. Such necessary specialization is widely recognized in other professions and other institutions. In the area of education, while specialization of personnel and function *within* the institution is recognized, specialization of institutional function is not so widely recognized and accepted.

In my judgment there must be a reorganization of governmental functions in big cities. At the present time responsibilities for

recreation, housing, feeding the poor, health services, social services, etc. are fragmented among a multitude of organizations. It is incredible to me that in this country at this time there can be people who are hungry. It is equally incredible to me that there are people in this country at this time who can live in sub-standard housing conditions and that most of us refuse to acknowledge the existence of such conditions. I submit, and this will tie in later with my own belief in accountability, that government functions should be reorganized so that primary responsibility for adequate health services is placed within a single agency to be held accountable for adequate health services. Similarly with a number of other services which are needed. The responsibility and resources for all formal education—for "schooling"—should be centered in the school system. Given such specialization of public functions, resources can be clearly earmarked, duplication reduced, and accountability more clearly held.

Another objective I would establish is the conceptual differentiation between the meaning of "education" and the meaning of "schooling." Too often there is laid at the doorstep of schools the expectation of satisfaction of unmet or partially met needs even though the means of satisfying those needs are only tangential to the objectives of the schools. I suspect that one of the reasons for this is that the terms "education" and "schooling" are used as synonyms. The term "education" is usually used without a clear referent and connotes a very broad and ill-defined boundary of meaning. Indication of the broadness of meaning is such a commonly used expression as "education is a life-long process." Given such a broad definition, virtually any type of human activity can be viewed as having some relationship to education. The logic then seems to be: if a need has an educational aspect, this implies schooling, and anything that implies schooling is the task of the schools.

A final priority I would assign is the development of a hierarchy of objectives for formal education as it occurs in schools or as a direct and immediate result of schooling. It should be apparent from my prior discussion that I am not willing to accept the conclusion that if an objective is valued, such an objective should automatically be accepted as one to be fulfilled by the schools. And this is not, as indicated earlier, to deny the pressing needs which society faces in the big city. My only suggestion is that these needs be fulfilled so far as possible by specialized agencies working in close coordination with one another.

In my judgment, there is only one institution that has been allocated massive resources and permitted sufficient specialization of function for the intellectual development of the child, and that is the schools. If one could completely erase formal schooling from the scene, one would be hard-pressed to find other institutions which are charged with the well-rounded intellectual development of boys and girls and young men and women. Educators have not always explicitly recognized what society has implicitly evolved—that is, that the intellectual development of the child and the transmission of basic academic skills is a task which can be performed only by schools and that no other institution on the contemporary scene has received such a charge.

In the establishment of a hierarchy of objectives for city schools, I submit that the primacy of the development of intellectual skills and values must be asserted. Intuitively, people in the ghettoes have reached the same conclusion, as is evidenced by the growing complaint about deplorably low achievement levels of children who attend ghetto schools.

The assertion of the primacy of objectives which involve intellectual and cognitive development does not necessarily imply that there can be no other objectives. What I am saying is that in the event of a mutual exclusiveness of objectives in a particular place, at a particular time, intellectual and cognitive objectives shall have primacy. Achievement of any other category of objectives cannot be made at the expense of the cognitive and intellectual development of the child. In my judgment, globally stated objectives are valueless. It is imperative, particularly in the case of the ghetto child, to specify objectives and to have tangible goals for teachers and administrators. The development of objectives which are not specific and to which clear meanings have not been ascribed is not a useful process. Objectives must be clear and sufficiently specific to serve as guides in the process of evaluation.

So much for the priorities of objectives. Now for a brief word about the priorities of means. The allocation of resources and the development of means should reflect the hierarchy of objectives. If reading skills are determined to be of primary importance and if the resources needed to teach reading skills effectively are not available because there is a diversion of funds to such activities as

interscholastic sports, the process of allocation of resources indicates that the schools do not really believe that adequate reading skills are a prime objective of the school system. Schools will always deal with scarce resources, and priorities must be developed for the allocation of these resources. Such priorities must reflect the hierarchy of objectives developed by the schools. I believe that if one analyzes a school system's budget one can determine the priorities that are truly held by those responsible for the system.

Many demands are made upon the schools. The intensity and quantity of such demands will in all probability increase. Unless the schools have a clear set of objectives and a clear procedure for allocating resources, responses to demands will tend to be expedient and contradictory rather than single-purposed and rational.

Now to the third category which I would like to discuss, the category of evaluation. I believe that we have arrived at the point at which we can no longer avoid close evaluation of the job of schooling of youngsters. Not only do citizens at large demand such an evaluation but the citizens in the ghetto, particularly, are concerned about the product of the school. It strikes me that the function of central administration, the function of a board of education, is to allocate the resources which will make for optimum conditions of teaching and learning. However, as these optimum conditions are approached, it seems to me that citizens at large and administrators have every right to expect an increment in learning on the part of the children.

Closely entwined with the whole topic of evaluation is the matter of expectations. I believe that one of the greatest enemies of children is the low set of expectations often held by both teachers and administrators. While their attitude might not be overtly expressed, observation of classes and of school administration indicates to me, at any rate, that the attitude is that "one cannot expect very much from these children." Sufficient experiments have been conducted which indicate that there is a direct relationship between the expectations which are held by teachers and administrators and the achievement of boys and girls. Somehow, the means must be found of upgrading the expectations of professional people and their students.

Permit me to summarize. I submit that there must be a reorganization of the political agencies of cities. There must be an allocation of responsibility for the fulfillment of functions on the part of special-

ized agencies. I submit one must differentiate conceptually between the meaning of schooling and the meaning of education. There must be a development of clear-cut and well-defined objectives, such objectives to be developed in hierarchical form with a discrete description of the outcomes which are expected. The allocation of resources which are made by the city school systems must be made in terms of the objectives established. We must create an atmosphere of expectation for academic achievement on the part of all youngsters. And finally, there must be developed a rigorous set of evaluative techniques which would indicate whether or not the activities which are presently being undertaken in compensatory education programs throughout the nation in truth have an effect upon the learning of children.

**Mr. Fadiman:**

Our third and final speaker is Martin Mayer. One might summarize his career by saying that he is one of our most socially responsible journalists. After graduation from Harvard he began his career as a reporter on the *New York Journal of Commerce*, became assistant editor of *Labor and Nation*, and later associate editor of *Esquire*. He has been research director of a study of international secondary education for the Twentieth Century Fund and for six years was chairman of a New York City local school board. He has written several books. Those of particular interest to us this evening are *The Schools*, published in 1961, and one published five years ago called *Where, When and Why: Social Studies in American Schools.*

**Martin Mayer:**

The first priority of the urban school is to get children functioning at a reasonable level of competence in the two languages, that is, in English and in mathematics. I would like to stress the second a little because I think there is a tendency in our educational system to regard mathematics as very secondary. It isn't; it is a way of organizing one's thought just as the language that I am speaking is. It is an increasingly important way of organizing thought and the children now in school will be very grievously crippled if they don't have it when they get out in the world. We live in a statistical age; that is never going to change. Children who cannot deal with these patterns of thought are going to be in bad trouble later on.

These two things, then, are the goal. Anyone who denies this goal is The Enemy—and not our enemy but the enemy of the child in the slums. However well-meaning he may be, however active he may be in political movements that try to help, he is an enemy. Ecstacy itself is no substitute for illiteracy. And everybody in this room agrees. In fact, really everybody in the society agrees. The problem is that when something is difficult people tend to quit and their way of quitting is to denigrate the goal. There is a growing tendency among people who deal with the problems of education in the ghetto to abandon the aim of a high level of literacy and a level of competence in mathematics and to get back to ain't-they-got-great-rhythm. More and more of this is going on and it is shocking. I am delighted that the Council for Basic Education is fighting this tendency.

But these things are not simple. Anybody who is living with the situation has to ask himself what he is going to do with the 14-year-old who dropped out or was pushed out psychically at age ten. There he is, he's age 14 and you've got him. (Incidentally, the age ten reference is a very important one; it is, in my observation, the crisis age; and one of the things that is wrong with the Head Start attitude is that it rests on hypothetical psychology rather than on anybody's observations. I'm not saying Head Start is a bad idea, it's obviously a good idea; it is just that I think there is a great deal of mileage to be gotten, maybe more than from Head Start, from preventing the losses at age ten and eleven, when previously successful students in slum schools tend to fail. Pushing hard at ages three and four is not going to do much about this, so far as I can see.)

However, we have this 14-year-old and he doesn't function or he functions very poorly. It is now a cruelty to him, it is a risk to his classmates and it is a horror to a sensitive teacher to keep pushing him hard on what he hasn't learned in eight years of school. You must find things that he can do, and that somebody will pay him to do later. And you have more chance to improve his functioning that way, too. Within the goal of competence, there must be room for charity and for finding standards which a child can meet, with the pleasure of accomplishment, when it is clear he cannot meet yours.

I'd like to make a passing reference to one problem which was not touched on here tonight which ought to be in people's minds, again a practical one. I refer to simple social stability—transiency—and this is not something the schools can do much about. We tried in New York to tell people, if you move, keep sending your kids to

the same school because it makes a difference. If you begin to break the figures down by number of schools, you find that the median level of performance correlates very well with the number of schools attended. I can show you schools in New York, I can show you schools in the District of Columbia too, where the turnover per year is more than 100 per cent. That doesn't mean that every child goes: there is a stable core of about 30 per cent and the other 70 per cent turns over more than once. I could never in five years get the New York City Board of Education to break down for me, or for the community, the scores from the schools in terms of who had been there a whole year and who hadn't. So we have no notion of what the school is getting done; and I'm not going to blame a teacher for the bad scores of kids who've been with her for only six weeks. And this, once again, is a little thing. But when you look at a school and you begin to look at test scores and the evaluation measures, you have got to know something, not about who is in the school in terms of the color of his skin or what his parents' income is, but how long he has been there. Very simple things like that, which by and large we don't know. We don't do that sort of thing, we don't do it because the people who are running the schools, with present company obviously excluded, are incompetent people who do what they did last year.

These strictures on what you should ask of the 14-year-old who doesn't function obviously apply only to a small minority of children, and almost none—none but the mentally retarded, anyway—during the first six grades. Yet we are in fact treating great numbers of elementary school children as though they were hopeless cases. I agree with what Mr. Riles said, but I have come increasingly to feel that all those things which stress how hard it is to educate these children—the courses in the culture of poverty and the like—probably do more harm than good. In ten years of visiting schools all over the country, many of them in slums, I have never yet run into a teacher who seemed to be functioning really well with ghetto kids who didn't say, "these kids are really like other kids." It is an absolutely universal phenomenon among successful teachers. I think this is a pre-condition of their doing well with the kids. One must never forget the danger of putting into the minds of the teachers the notion that all these kids are basket cases. Children are not all the same, of course, and their problems, as Mr. Riles pointed out, are real: the health problem is very severe; the family coherence

problem is very severe; and there are many others. But for instructional purposes, I think children are not so different as we are making them out to be. We need less concern about why the children don't learn and more concern about why we don't successfully teach.

We need, I suspect, a greater understanding of what it is that is difficult to learn, in such apparently simple things as reading and arithmetic; and we need greater understanding about the interaction of human intelligence with the materials we teach. We have heard, ad nauseum, about the differential rates of success from social class to social class, from ethnic group to ethnic group, but nobody seems ever to mention the very interesting fact that all children make the same or very similar, mistakes during the course of the learning process. We need a feeling for coherence and structure, for what it is that conduces to these mistakes and what it is that avoids these mistakes. We need a frame of reference; we need, for the children, a sense of causality. This will be different at different ages, but it can be developed. A recent issue of the *CBE Bulletin* contained a quotation I can't accept, to the effect that "good teachers will make good curriculum, while poor teachers will make poor curriculum, so let's get ourselves teachers." It's not that easy to get teachers, to begin with. But beyond that, teachers are nothing without something to teach, and the best of them, as is quite visible in the mathematical capacity of nearly everyone in this room—and many of us had perfectly decent math teachers—cannot make the thing work if all they have to teach is what they know. You mustn't go over on the other side; there is no teacher-proof material; but the most obvious way to improve any teacher is by giving her something better to teach. I have no nostrum to peddle. I am willing to buy computer-assisted instruction, responsive environment, linguistics, phonics, more rote memory, Montessori, anything that by measures which seem reasonably valid and not unreliable produces an improvement in results and which can be explained to me in a way that respects my intelligence as a listener. I am not willing to have people tell me that a child educates himself without guidance unless he is prepared to advocate the abolition of schools.

Another point I would emphasize is the matter of expectations. Permit me to refer to an experience of my own when we brought in Larry Senesh's economics program to two schools in my district. We were at the same time bringing in a number of kids from East Harlem for the first time to grades one and two. And we fudged

the test scores, because in New York we group from the first grade, and what we did was to take the top third of the local group and the top third of the kids who were being bused in and put them in the top group, and we took the middle third for the second class and the bottom third for the third class. In fact, of the kids who were coming in from East Harlem, there were only two in the whole crowd who would have made the first group by themselves and very few in the second group who wouldn't have been in the third group on the basis of the test. We then gave the teachers new material. They didn't know how the kids should react, for they hadn't been teaching it before. And I went around with Senesh and we found that in both schools the material was being dealt with at a considerably higher level with the top group than it was with the second or third groups. We would ask the teachers why they were doing this and they would say, "Well, these kids up in the top group are better kids." But a third of each of these classes were kids from Harlem who were not "better" kids.

There really is something to this expectation business. But that doesn't mean you can order expectation. You can't, in a political office or even in a professional office, simply say to people that they've got to expect more. Nothing happens. And here again we have the materials reference. We need things upon which kids can perform to give teachers the experience which alone can change expectation. And here, too, in this one focus, I think we can make room for relevance, because I think that the adult sense of what will be relevant to the child helps with the adult's expectation of how the child will do with the materials. I do not think there is a hill of beans of value in the current notion of relevance. The child thinks something is irrelevant because it is dull and if it is not dull he doesn't think it is irrelevant. But the adult who thinks something is relevant to the child will expect more from him.

A good specific is the Swahili silliness that we went through in New York last year. Swahili has nothing whatsoever to do with the American Negro. It is a fake East African pidgin language developed to help the Arabs in the slave trade. So what! The fact that teachers will expect colored kids to do well in Swahili while they won't expect them to do well in French makes it perfectly reasonable, to my mind, to offer Swahili. Again we have mushrooming courses in Negro history. The subject interests me and I've read a lot of it. And I recommend to you the work of a great

man named James Weldon Johnson, who's a superb artist in prose—an autobiography called *Along This Way* which is immensely worth reading on all counts, an introduction to a fascinating man. But most of what is being taught under the rubric of Negro history is shockingly foolish if you wish to be shocked—Crispus Attucks, for God's sake! A man who enters history as a stiff! This sort of thing one can very easily sit on, but again, so what! We have taught kids for years about George Washington and the cherry tree; what they learn about Theodore Roosevelt is scandal; they never heard of Altgeld or Big Bill Haywood; they never heard of working class movements in the United States in the nineteenth century; and they study a crazy myth of the frontier. So let there be biased and incompetent and foolish Negro history, too. Why not? The kids will be expected to do better at it and they probably will. There is a value to it. Even the bi-lingual business, I think, can be defended on that basis though I must say I don't think it can be defended on many others. We've had bi-lingual education in New Mexico now for a very long time. The state, until quite recently, had two official languages in its state legislature, and the kids in the Spanish communities, as a teacher at a school in Albuquerque said to me, "grow up illiterate in two languages." The experience of Belgium is bad, the experience of Switzerland is not good. It is a very hard problem, and it is being dealt with in the most simplistic and unimaginative way by people who are flattered if you call them second-rate. Nevertheless, because it is going to improve the teacher's expectation of the kid, it's probably worth doing.

One more point, and an unexpected one, I hope. There is a serious priority for the urban school system in the next decade to retain the middle-class student. There is a clear reference here in the Coleman Report. Integration is important, but it is going to be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to do it across municipality lines into the suburbs. Major efforts are necessary by urban school systems to seek to hold the middle-class kid. It's not going to be easy; I'm not saying it is. It's here, oddly enough, where I think art and music have their greatest value because this means a great deal to middle-class parents. There should be, of course, Advanced Placement courses and the like. But it is, I think, the corporate life of the school which will help to hold the middle class. It goes without saying, to me, that if the poor are to have Head Start, some kind of nursery school program should be set up to the maximum extent feasible with the money

for the middle-class kids, too. We are talking about a minimum of $600-$700 per child and only a very small proportion of the population can afford to pay for that themselves.

If there is reason to believe that one can, through extending the urban school system down a little, help to retain the middle-class population in the cities, there are reasons of national policy and of the correct functioning of the school system to look quite seriously at an allocation of resources for that purpose. Perhaps these are reasons for the Federal government to consider whether that sort of program might be worth supporting outside the ghetto areas too, once all of the ghetto areas have it.

We hear now a great deal of talk about community participation. We must find some way to get people in all kinds of government, especially schools, to listen to what parents are saying to them and to what the world around them is saying, and as things are now you don't get them to listen much. To that extent it is very important to have a decentralized system with community participation. It will also undoubtedly help to get money for added services, because people will fight very much harder for things that are going to come right into their area than they will for big city-wide budgets. But beyond that, frankly, on the basis of considerable observation, I doubt very strongly that it deserves anything like the importance the academic sociologists of the Ford Foundation have been giving it, and it certainly isn't worth the trouble it is making right now.

## DISCUSSION

(The speakers responded for over an hour to questions from the audience. A portion of their responses, arranged by topic, are printed below.)

### Evaluation

**Dr. Dolce:** National assessment is one type of evaluation. I am more concerned about marshalling the resources for evaluation much closer to home and to the big cities themselves; and also getting people to be sensitive to, and accepting, the whole evaluation process. There is now a tendency to deny the validity of tests that have been given for many years and have always been accepted until they are used in some sort of evaluation procedure. I suspect that this is a sort of defensive mechanism because education in general has not been held accountable for its product. I concede the extreme difficulty

of developing evaluation techniques that are reliable. It will not be an easy task.

**Mr. Mayer:** There is a desperate need for tests or instruments which tell you what the child seems to be doing so that you can apply judgment to this and find out whether it seems worthwhile or not. There is no great need for tests which try to determine whether the child is doing what you want him to do. To use an old line, people use research the way drunks use lamp posts—for support rather than for illumination. We inevitably find this in the current structure because of the narrow ranges that we tend to measure with the tests. The narrower you make what you measure the more reliable your test will be.

**Mr. Riles:** As you know, Title I requires an evaluation. We took this seriously in our state. We see to it that evaluations are done as well as possible with currently available instruments. I would like to say that as I read legislatures, or at least the California legislature, there are likely to be no more blank checks given to school districts. The legislators are asking what you are doing with the money you have. I think it's reasonable, if the legislators put five billion dollars into the public education system, that the question be asked, "How are you doing?" I want to know, too. I simply want to know whether a child who comes in in September is reading any better in May or June.

### Teacher autonomy versus central authority

**Mr. Riles:** I don't think it should be an either/or situation. I think both the teachers and the administrators should be involved in the process of curriculum change, and the students too, at some level. I agree that you cannot expect change to be handed down from on high. On the other hand, my own experiences have shown me that it is a mistake to turn it over completely to the teachers.

**Dr. Dolce:** If there could be agreement on the objectives and if they could be spelled out in sufficient manner so that all understood clearly what they mean, and if there were an agreed-upon method of evaluation which would determine the progress of youngsters, I would have no hesitation whatsoever in giving the maximum amount of freedom to the classroom teacher. However, I think it is incumbent on a school system, because it does possess greater resources than individual teachers, to develop alternative strategies for instruction in particular fields at particular levels.

**Mr. Mayer:** My observation is that teachers tend to be very conservative, and are not full of new ideas they want to try out. If the administrator says to the teacher, "It's your problem, you do it," the teacher will tend to do exactly what he did before. If a teacher comes to you and says, "I took a course this summer with Professor So-and-So and he teaches math this way and I want to try it," then you say, "By all means, do it." But the teacher should be obliged to give the rationale and he should be asked to keep records. If you just let the teachers operate on their own, I think you will get a more ossified sytsem than we have now. It's an awful thing to say, but that's what I've observed.

### Middle-class teachers in ghetto schools

**Mr. Riles:** I disagree with some of my friends who feel that only black teachers, or teachers who come from a poverty background, can teach in these schools. We are finding that many young, idealistic, middle-class people who want a challenge are attracted to these schools. I feel that the colleges have failed us in the past in preparing young people as teachers in disadvantaged areas. Instead of just taking the academic and education courses, these youngsters should understand the sociology and the background and get acquainted with the problems and the parents, so they will know what it is all about.

**Mr. Mayer:** I see no reason to be ashamed of being middle class. I think this is being over-stressed to an appalling degree right now. In my observation of the Negro school community I find it's really a pretty square community. It is anxious to be middle class itself. I find there much more loyalty and appreciation for things that are done for kids than I find resentment of the white, middle-class teacher. I think that we are being victimized by the Norman Mailer attitudes in this area. In general, if you do a job with the kids you don't have to worry about your social class background or even, in most situations, the color of your skin. My own feeling is that if we really taught people how to teach reading it would be worth a great deal of sociology courses. It would be worth a great deal in the teachers' relations with the kids, the parents, and the community. This is a technical job that is being done very poorly. It is really worthwhile to concentrate our attention on the technical job, on teaching reading well, and to worry a little less about the larger sociological manifestations of the problem. I am not saying

that they are not there, that they should be ignored; what I am saying is that too much emphasis is being put on this side of things and put on it to some extent at the expense of the real mission of the schools, as Dr. Dolce described it.

### The role of the school in social adjustment and teaching values

**Dr. Dolce:** As a general rule, I have difficulty defining what people mean by social adjustment or teaching values. I don't know that we know how to directly teach values. I feel that we do know a little bit about how to teach reading and how to teach mathematics. For the child who is unable to read there is an obvious objective, and that is to teach that child to read. There are other things for the schools to teach besides the basic kinds of things I have talked about. I think an appreciation of the arts is very important for the educated person but in the hierarchy that I have established this cannot be used as a substitute for the ability to read and write and communicate and do mathematics. The schools are rightfully being criticized for failing to stimulate basic academic achievement among a certain group of its students. Of course, after a certain level of development on the part of the child has been reached, education and schooling can be more open-ended.

### Does Federal money make a difference?

**Mr. Riles:** Title I requires that this money is to be put in schools with the greatest concentration of disadvantaged youngsters. We had great resistance to this and I understand why the resistance came: because it is easier for school superintendents and boards to spread the money all around. And in many states that is exactly what is happening and Title I is being used for general aid. But because we had the support of our State Board of Education we were able to tell every district, "You concentrate this in the schools where there is the most need." And I think if you do not do that, and instead just provide a little bit for everyone, it is not going to make a difference.

**Dr. Dolce:** What Federal aid has bought in our school district is simply the provision of basic necessities that should have been in the ghetto schools all along. Federal aid has not been sufficiently massive, or concentrated, and I think that to expect large increments

from small inputs is unrealistic. But I think that one of the greatest impacts of Federal aid has been that it has, for the first time, given hope and raised the aspirations of people. It has planted the seeds for a real and continued push for improving the quality of instruction. However, I am not sure that the increments so far are always real. We know, through a longitudinal study that has taken place over six years with a thousand of our youngsters, that while some of these youngsters show increases, there are unexplained marked drops in achievement on the part of others that is almost heartbreaking. Our study seems to indicate that we have built it up but now it is falling to pieces again. I think this has been substantiated by other, similar studies.

### The Bereiter-Engelmann approach

**Mr. Mayer:** I imagine all of us on this program are pragmatists about it. On anything that is given to me as something that solves the educational problem, I want to see five years' worth of data. I do not want to see what you can do from month to month and I don't want to see what you can do in the first year of a program. I want to see the program in a minimum of five places and I want to have a longitudinal study of the kids, done by people other than the people who started the program. Given all this, I am for trying it out, but let's not put too many of our emotional eggs in one basket, because we don't know much about the long-term effects of these things. One of the few things we do know about our children's learning is that it doesn't proceed smoothly. It moves in jumps, and there are plateaus between jumps. What a high-pressure system such as Bereiter and Engelmann's does is something I would very much like to know. I am not biased against it, but I am not prepared to accept the evidence to date as conclusive.

### Problems of time and money

**Mr. Mayer:** B. F. Skinner said, when he first came out with the teaching machine, that it's impossible to believe that a child needs all the time he actually spends in high school to learn what he actually learns there. I think this is a just statement. As to the money problem, we spend $1100 per child in New York City. I think that we have demonstrated, but conclusively, that merely putting in more money doesn't do you much good. You must know how you want to spend it. One would hope that with the development of ways to spend

it there would be more money available. But I don't think that the crucial problem at the moment in most places—*in most places*—really is money.

**Mr. Riles:** I'll accept Mr. Mayer's explanation of the time problem but I would like to comment on the money problem. My strategy would be to evaluate the program and then demonstrate to those who hold the purse strings that, for a given amount of resources, under certain conditions, you can produce this kind of result. Then I think fair-minded men will let you do it. I think we will have to begin applying some sort of cost-effectiveness in our public schools. I think that the best way to get more money for the schools is to be able to go to our decision makers and show them that with these resources you can get these kinds of measurable results. But under present conditions, where we can't show anything measurable, I can understand why there is reluctance to put money into continued failures.

## Special academic high schools in the city

**Dr. Dolce:** I have some concerns about our own attempt in New Orleans to develop a specialized institution. I think that conceptually it is an excellent idea. And it has had a degree of success. My concern is that this will serve as a substitute for improving the quality of education in other schools in the system. Where the school system can point with pride to the one, two, three or six excellent academic institutions, I think there is a tendency on the part of these institutions to develop a certain snob appeal. This concerns me because it is the very antithesis of what public education is all about. There's a tendency, too, for the curriculum and the viewpoints of the professional staff to become ossified, with very little response to desirable change. All I am saying is that I think the concept a good one but there are some caveats in going this route. And I think the whole matter of maintaining an integrated student body is a very real kind of problem. In our own case, the number of Negro students enrolled in this particular high school is very small because the historically inadequate educational background these youngsters have had just doesn't let them meet the entrance requirements. It seems to me that in these schools there must be a deliberate attempt to maintain some kind of racial balance without reducing the standards.

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